

# Literacy Link

Fall 2007

## From the Editors' Desktops



In *Higher Education: Ethics and Leadership in the Modern University*, former Duke President Nannerl O. Keohane tells her readers the best model for higher education is one that teaches students how to think and engage actively in their world around them. In the next ten or twenty years, she argues,

Education will be less *ergo-centric* and more *logo-centric*: that is, it will be focused more on structures of knowing and reasoning, less directed toward teaching people trade skills, or specific kinds of technical knowledge that will be used directly in their jobs. (56)

This evolving definition of higher education fits our idea of literacy as well. When *Literacy Link* began over a decade ago, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write well on the university level. However, in the past few years in this journal, we've broadened that definition in multiple ways: the ability to read and write well, yes, but to think and reason, to understand and work within specific academic disciplines, and to stimulate and develop one's natural curiosity and talents.

With this modern definition, we are pleased to feature a variety of articles in the Fall 2007 issue of *Literacy Link* that explore several of these ideas. First, we feature Tim Kenyon's essay, "Writing in Every Classroom: Now More Than Ever," an exploration of the importance

of writing across the curriculum. We have included "Promoting Math Literacy, or M(ath) + R(esource) C(enter) = Success," an article about the Math Resource Center and its role in developing math literacy by Amy Hlavacek and Nancy Colwell, along with "Introducing First-Year Students to College: The Academic Transitions Digital Portfolio Project," an article about the College Transitions Program and its use of technology as a method of developing incoming students' academic literacy by Brian Thomas. Also, "Writing Teaches Writing: The Saginaw Bay Writing Project," by Gillan Markey, explores the history and current mission of the Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute, a K-16 program for writing teachers. Finally, we round off

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the issue with Sue Plachta's review of *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Literacy Link*.

Sincerely,

Chris Giroux

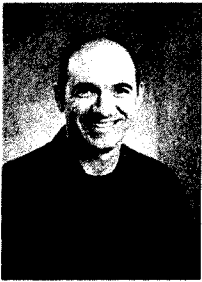
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## Writing in Every Classroom: Now More Than Ever



*Tim Kenyon*  
*Instructor of English*

Not too long ago, I had a nightmare. I found myself drowning in a swirling sea of advertisement and consumable goods only to wake and discover I'd fallen asleep in front of the television. At that moment, I truly understood what it's like to be our students. Considering their world, a constant mutation of fashion, fad, and pseudo-glitterati, one can only wonder what opportunity they have to learn how to make viable, sound decisions. To be a part of our society, of a democracy that is starving for real thinkers with real ideas, students need the tools to engage in discourse that will carry them beyond the television screen and the 30-second ads

that, by design, impede sound decision-making.

Now more than ever, students need to be challenged in all disciplines to write and think critically about how they can impact the world. Our collective primary goal at the university should be to matriculate students who can enter the world ready to not only understand the complexities of public discourse, but also participate in it wisely and effectively.

In my years as a writing teacher, I have come to anticipate those students who begrudgingly occupy the seats of my composition classes. A collection of long faces among the genuinely curious, these beleaguered students are quick to state that they don't see how English relates to their chosen profession. Even with the outcomes so clearly stated in the course syllabus, students still pine for a definitive answer that is more consumable, more "sound byte-ish." I give them my typical, rote response—that writing is a necessary part of any chosen profession and there's a lot more to this class than just churning

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out essays. This seems to satisfy them, but our conflict-hungry, media-saturated world has made it increasingly obvious that the true answer they seek is much more complicated than that, much more important and crucial. And rightly so.

Writing is a way to discover the interconnectivity of everything. It is a way to share the responsibility of the direction of our society. With writing, we can contribute to the public discourse, even on the most minute level, even if it means writing only one letter, even if it means touching only one life. As long as the basis of the writing is grounded in reason and critical thought, each of us can make an impact in some part of the world.

When considering the central purpose of the general education curriculum at SVSU—to help students think critically, reason logically, and communicate effectively—it becomes clear that writing is a necessary tool to ensure our students gain the intellectual stimulation and growth they need. However, the incorporation of writing into the university curriculum should not stop with a student's general education. Writing needs to be a constant presence. As teachers, we need to embrace this reality rather than guide our students away from it or dismiss it altogether.

Dr. Francis Dane recently shed light on an unfortunate reality that has become the quintessential black sheep of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC):

I know more than one instructor who quit assigning papers because grading poorly constructed papers was too difficult. Others quit assigning papers because they did not want to have to “teach English” in their courses. Still others do assign papers, but have quit providing realistic feedback (and realistic grades) for fear of insulting, demotivating, or otherwise adversely affecting their students. (3)

This institution is representative of a

place where students can test-drive their critical thinking, their reasoning and logic. They can learn from their mistakes, but it is up to us, as their teachers and mentors, to embrace those mistakes. It is unfair to prevent students from learning by constructing an environment that will keep their mistakes from happening in the first place.

The mere fact that writing is being avoided, removed from the classroom, or used as a time-consuming yet pedagogically barren filler is indicative of fear. Some teachers are concerned that writing will distract students from content or will force writing instruction into their curriculum. Some feel that writing simply has no place in their classrooms. These attitudes only fuel the chagrin and perplexity of students asking their composition teachers, “Why am I here?”

Those reluctant to incorporate writing into their classrooms are overlooking the basic reason for having writing there in the first place. According to John Bean, a professor of English at Seattle University and long-time advocate for WAC, the fear of incorporating writing into the classroom is based on a series of four clear misconceptions.

First is the loss of valuable attention to content. Bean argues instead that

the primary effect of adding writing and critical thinking components to a course is the restructuring and transforming of students' study time outside of class. (9)

As a result of writing, students begin to recognize their learning as purposeful and interesting. In fact, while content does make up a significant portion of the curriculum in many disciplines, lecture need not be the only way to deliver that content. Writing can serve as a tool to encourage retention and critical thinking,

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and can reduce the need to repeat textbook information in lecture.

***Just as we cannot exclude writing, we cannot compartmentalize it.***

The second misconception is that writing assignments are unsuitable for certain courses, such as in the quantitative and technical fields, where facts and concepts reign. While formal essays are often the writing assignment of choice, they are by far not the only one. Bean calls for a rethinking of what defines a writing assignment: there are those with

metacognitive aim—helping students reflect on their own thinking processes or productively altering their methods of studying or reading. Or those with procedural aim—helping students learn disciplinary methods of inquiry and analysis. (10)

The most basic, and often useful, of all writing assignments are those that are short, focused, and ungraded. My first experience with this type of “writing to learn” exercise came during an observation of a colleague teaching the Law of Sines to her introductory trigonometry class. While she explained the concept in the language of mathematics, her students were directed to explain it in the language of writing, a task that allowed them to think critically about how the law is structured and why it works rather than simply memorizing it. This written explanation did not replace the content, nor did it take valuable time away from it. Uncollected and ungraded, this writing assignment still managed to achieve its goal. Writing of any kind should not be avoided due to a lack of terminology or method to implement the proper kind of writing based on the outcomes of the content lesson or the course as a whole.

Another misconception is the idea that grading papers is by default a burdensome task. As a writing teacher, I concede to the reality of assigning formal papers: grading them is challenging. However,

even with longer papers, the load can be managed while maintaining sanity and fairness in grading. Bean encourages us to place the burden on the student allowing us the time to “maximize the help we give students while keeping our own workloads manageable” (217). By making students do more of the work, more than just writing the paper, we can all ease our workloads and remain more focused. This can be done in many ways: encourage peer review of drafts, recommend use of the Writing Center, and implement directed group conferences. Each of these revision processes can help lessen our burden. Peer review and the Writing Center are helpful resources if only to give students and their papers the benefit of another reader prior to submitting for a grade. With conferences, either in person or on paper, students can be prompted to answer specific questions about how their writing has met the objective of the assignment, yet another writing exercise designed to promote critical thinking while making our job of grading the final product easier.

Lastly, Bean addresses a very common misconception in the use of writing in the classroom. Many teachers feel they are not knowledgeable enough about writing and grammar to help students. However, Bean calls for us to

discover that your own experience as an academic writer and reader, combined with your experience in how scholars in your field inquire and argue, should be all the background you need to help your students with their writing. (11)

There are no special tools or training needed to effectively and fairly grade a student’s writing. Teachers need only to be honest readers and utilize what they already know about their discipline to provide what a student needs to grow as a writer.

Not all students are born writers, just as not all are born biologists, mathematicians, nurses, economists, or educators.

**Existing technology, such as VSpace, can help students engage with people and material to help them feel like they belong in college.**

a King-Chavez-Parks 4-S Grant. The program was designed to help students who are academically or financially at-risk adapt to the academic rigors of being a college student. A total of 35 students

attended a two-day on-campus workshop and then, under the guidance of a faculty mentor, completed a two-week online seminar. The workshop and seminar introduced students to the types of activities they would be expected to complete as university students. Topics that were

covered included reading, note-taking, and test-taking skills. Moreover, we encouraged students to evaluate their own performance through a series of reflective writing activities throughout the seminar.

While it is too early to determine whether students who participated in this program will have higher grades or retention rates, feedback so far has been positive. One student described the two-day workshop as very helpful and explained that

It made me more comfortable with the campus...[.] Also meeting all the new students made me even more excited for college life. The advisors were great and very helpful.

Another student noted, "My experience

was a great one [as] I realized that I wasn't the only one who was afraid of the first day of the workshop."

A critical part of the program consisted of using online technology to help students demonstrate and develop competency in skill areas relevant to college success. VSpace allowed students to complete activities and engage with one another from a variety of locations and asynchronously around summer work and vacation schedules. Furthermore, students became familiar with technology commonly used in classes at the university. VSpace modules also challenged students by requiring them to view streaming video of short lectures from classes first-year students often take. Multiple choice tests, online discussion with other students, and a coursepack then gave students the opportunity to test their study skills and ability to retain and apply material without negatively affecting their GPAs. Faculty mentors also provided feedback to help ensure that mistakes made during the seminar would not be repeated during the semester. The seminar was not easy, but it afforded students the chance to reflect on what they should and should not do during the semester. As one student explained,

My note taking skills helped me out but some of the question[s] were worded in a way which was hard to understand. I [could watch] the

### Call for Papers

The editors of *Literacy Link* invite members of the campus community to submit articles for review and possible inclusion in the Winter 2008 issue.

Articles may address a variety of literacy practices including such topics as strategies, activities, research, critical thinking, writing across the curriculum, or book reviews. The editors are especially interested in how literacy is defined by different disciplines, how professors use literacy in their various classes, what professors expect of student writing, what professors encounter in student writing, and how students respond to literacy expectations.

Articles for *Literacy Link* should run 500 to 1,500 words in length. Authors should follow either MLA or APA format.

Submit articles to

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Submission deadline for the Winter 2008 issue is **February 1, 2008**.

lecture again and also read the note taking thing again.

Working together in a group, even online, appeared to help some students learn. One student stated, "I like seeing how everyone thinks and interprets things differently. For some reason that is really interesting to me."

Additionally, students seemed to have formed some social relationships as a result of the workshop and seminar. Discussions with some students indicate continued social interaction with peers they met during the workshop, and some social relations appear to have continued online through social networking sites, such as Facebook.

There is no magic bullet to help all students who show up at college unprepared. However, the Digital Portfolio Project offers one potential solution to help alleviate the problem. Existing technology, such as VSpace, can help students engage with people and material to help them

feel like they belong in college. The online environment, however, provides a variety of challenges, such as ensuring widespread technical accessibility. Some students did not have high-speed internet connections, and technical problems made completing some activities problematic. Faculty and staff were also challenged to develop content that was reflective of a college environment without being too challenging for students who had yet to attend a single class. In addition, keeping students engaged in the subject matter was, at times, difficult as well, which suggests that future programs will need to consider how to communicate and provide feedback in an online environment. Still, whether the issue is technological access, academic rigor, or student engagement, these are obstacles that all successful college students must learn to negotiate. By exploring the nature of these obstacles before the semester starts, students have the opportunity to examine what it is to be a successful college student before grades, or the possibility of getting a degree, are at risk.

## Writing Teaches Writing: The Saginaw Bay Writing Project

Gillan Markey

Lecturer of English

With Reflections by Janet Adair, Deb VanSumeren, and Sarah Richard

*He meant well, truly he did. Leaning across his desk, the sunburned, bald-headed college prep teacher advised a earnest college-bound senior, "Not all students can write, you know." And after years of having my papers pelted with red marks and low grades, I believed him: I couldn't write. Thirty years later, I signed up for an in-depth study of writing through the Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP) Summer Institute. In just four weeks of being enrolled in the Institute, I became a stronger writing teacher. The SBWP Summer Institute provided*

*invaluable experiences and resources for me, all within the context of becoming a writer myself. I gained extensive knowledge that I am able to transfer to my students. During the Institute, there were guest speakers, modeled lessons, peer conferencing, sacred writing time, articles and books, literature circles, and teacher demonstrations. Repeatedly, I learned the importance of connecting literature to the writing process, not merely having literature present in the classroom. I now look forward to enhancing students' writing "craft": exploding a moment,*



*adding a voice, providing thought and snapshot examples, revising without enabling, and much more.*

***H***ow exhilarating to shatter the misconception “not all students can write” for myself and my students.

*Personally, I experienced writing beyond my high school rut. I wrote every day. The best writing emerged after sacred writing time and vulnerable moments of sharing with others. The dismissive comment made years ago by my college prep teacher made writing the anthology piece hard; however, it was my most memorable experience. I drafted, revised, deleted half of it, redrafted and revised again and again. Peer input and applicable lessons were the encouragement I needed to continue revisiting the entire writing process. How exhilarating to shatter the misconception “not all students can write” for myself and my students. The red pen is gone; I’ve acquired new skills and knowledge about myself and writing, thanks to the SBWP Summer Institute.*

*—Janet Adair, third grade teacher, Handley Elementary, Saginaw Public Schools, SBWP Summer Institute Class of 2007*

With the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, teachers are under more pressure than ever to “show results” on state standardized tests while simultaneously negotiating demands on their time to develop curricula, gather writing samples, review test scores, and attend mandated in-services and workshops. The Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP) Summer Institute acknowledges the importance of these tests and empowers teachers with strategies to improve student performance; in addition, it provides teachers with a space to step back and reflect on their craft as both teachers and writers—breathing fresh air into their professional lives while honoring their experiences as individuals whose rich, literate lives outside of the classroom only enrich the lives of their students within.

The SBWP is part of the National Writing Project (NWP) founded in the early 1970’s in California by Jim Gray, an educational pioneer who believed in the power of teachers teaching teachers. The first Summer Institute was launched by California’s Bay Area Writing Project in 1973 and the SBWP—founded in 1993 by Dr. Kay Harley—has hosted its own Summer Institute at Saginaw Valley State University every year since its inception.

Initially attracting teachers primarily from the Saginaw Public School District, in 1998, the SBWP worked to ensure long-term growth by intentionally reaching out to teachers from surrounding districts: Bay, Midland, Saginaw Township, Tuscola, and Genesee. This summer, participants included teachers and administrators from Saginaw Public Schools, Bay City Public Schools, St. Elizabeth Catholic School in Reese, Reese Public Schools, Michael J. MicGiveney School in Saginaw, North Branch Area Schools, Oscoda Area Schools, Flint Community Schools, Delta College, and SVSU.

*My experiences within the four weeks of the Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute changed my life, both professionally and personally. On a professional level, the bar I had set for literacy instruction in all subject areas had to be raised based on my experience in the Institute, and I was able to glean both theory and practical knowledge that was immediately applicable to my position as a curriculum coach in my school district. Following the Institute, my district was able to develop a year-long literacy focus across all grade levels and all subject areas at our middle-school site.*

*To begin the literacy focus, students wrote every day, building their writing fluency and stamina as authors. Secondly, students wrote multiple essays, developing their knowledge and experience of the writing process. Our teachers and administrators gave feedback on students’ progress, creating a*

*greater level of buy-in from all involved. Growth was immediate and evident. After only one month of daily writing instruction and practice, we experienced a great level of improvement on the Writing portion of the MEAP test. During the 2006–2007 academic year, 520 students maintained the proficiency standard. An additional 176 students reached the level of proficiency, all of whom were not proficient the previous year. We saw our number of blank narrative essays on the MEAP test move from over 150 down to 34, again, with only three weeks of brief, focused writing practice each day. Our students became more comfortable with putting their knowledge and thoughts on paper in no time. They became authors immediately, and they knew it!*

*Finally, I am thankful for my experiences within the Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute on a personal level. The writing of my anthology piece was a large step toward the healing of my soul after the loss of my father. I saw and now understand firsthand the power of the written word.*

*—Deb VanSumeren, assistant principal at Handy Middle School, Bay City Public Schools, SBWP Summer Institute Class of 2006*

The structure of the Summer Institute, as established by the NWP, consists of three major components: the anthology piece, the inquiry piece, and the teacher demonstration. For the anthology piece, teachers temporarily let go of their role as instructors and become student writers, engaging in the process and moving along the stages from prewriting to drafting to revising. Participants discover and develop a “seed idea” gathered from their own experience, meeting with instructors, fellow writers, and writing response groups to focus their ideas and apply revision strategies taught during instructor presentations. Then, for the inquiry piece, participants document their research around a self-chosen topic of study, a “burning question” relating to the teaching of writing. The inquiry piece

may take many forms, from a series of lesson plans to a letter to an administrator to an article for a professional publication. Finally, teacher demonstrations provide the invaluable opportunity for teachers to learn from one another. Each teacher demonstrates a “sample lesson” from their classroom, one they feel is effective or one on which they desire feedback; other teachers provide this feedback, affirming best teaching practices and making suggestions for future presentations.

In addition to these fundamental activities, the participants engage in literature circles, reading and discussing a professional book of their choosing. Guest presenters provide additional instruction in specialized topics like writing to learn, writers as mentors, the teaching of poetry, and revision. This summer, Terry Wooten—a respected Michigan poet—conducted a poetry workshop. As a result, more than one participant submitted a poem for their final anthology piece.

While the experiences of individuals are as varied as what each brings to the program, the four-week Summer Institute creates a community for teachers in which they invariably come together as writers, teachers, learners, and—perhaps most importantly—fellow human beings. Participants return to their classrooms richer for the experience, empowered with new strategies, new literature, and a renewed sense of who they are as both people and professionals. They also often return to the SBWP to conduct workshops or co-lead the institute.

***It was a life-changing experience for me: the philosophy of teachers teaching teachers was truly powerful.***

*Fortunately for me, very fortunately, many colleagues in my first two years of teaching—friends, co-teachers, mentors, and content coaches—related their very positive experiences of being involved in the Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute and shared teaching strategies they found valuable in the classroom. This exchange of ideas—directly related to the Institute—was the beginning of my*



*writing philosophy as a teacher.*

*Immediately, after engaging some of these best practices, I saw a strong, positive impact on my students and their writing skills. With the encouragement of these six colleagues, my interest developed into a real desire to participate in the Saginaw Bay Writing Project as well as the National Writing Project.*

*After being nominated, I was able to participate in the Saginaw Bay Writing Institute during Summer 2007. It was a life-changing experience for me: the philosophy of teachers teaching teachers was truly powerful.*

*I not only learned from project members*

*and my instructors. I was also inspired by them on a daily basis. I gained a wealth of knowledge and a network of friends and experts I trust. Personally, I discovered myself as a writer. It was through this experience that I will now be able to really understand how my students often struggle and develop as writers. The Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute has given me a collection of gifts, and I am so proud to have been a part of it. I would recommend this experience to all teachers—no matter what their content area or level of expertise.*

*—Sarah Richard, ELA intervention teacher, Handy Middle School, Bay City Public Schools, SBWP Summer Institute Class of 2007*

## Promoting Math Literacy, or M(ath) + R(esource) C(enter) = Success



*Amy Hlavacek  
Assistant Professor of Mathematical Sciences*

*Nancy Colwell  
Associate Professor of Mathematical Sciences*

When most people think of literacy, they think of the ability to read fluently and write well. We certainly would never argue with this. (In fact, the ability to write well would be a nice skill to possess as we sit down to compose this article.) However, another type of literacy that we believe is essential, and that is frequently overlooked, is mathematical literacy.

For a student, mathematical literacy involves not just memorizing enough to pass the next math test or quiz and then forgetting it as soon as possible, but understanding the concepts well enough to carry them into the next class, whether it be a higher level math class or a chemistry or economics class. From our own experience in teaching, it is

frequently weaknesses in prerequisite classes that gives students the most trouble. Students in Calculus II sometimes struggle more with trigonometry than with the new material. Students in Calculus III often suffer from a lack of algebra skills. However, it is not only the students who are planning to take more math classes who will need to use math skills. A few years ago, the Department of Mathematical Sciences set up meetings with other departments and colleges to find out how well our courses were serving their needs. Almost unanimously, the Math Department found that everyone felt there was a need for their students to have stronger algebra skills. The teachers we had spoken to reported that students in their classes were often held back by an inability to work with simple formulae.



Mathematical literacy also means being able to use these skills in real life since mathematical concepts are used when converting measurements, buying a car, or filling out tax forms. To be a well-informed citizen, it is important to be able to correctly interpret the statistics that are so casually thrown out in newspaper articles and television broadcasts. A friend of ours was once appalled by a young man who had come to install a carpet in her home and was not able to determine the area of the room. Author and mathematician John Paulos, in his book *Innumeracy* (2003), tells the story of a weatherman who said there was a 50% chance of rain on Saturday, and a 50% of rain on Sunday, so added together this made a 100% chance of rain over the weekend (p. 3). Mathematical errors are not just comical; they can be costly and devastating as well: The failure of NASA to convert English measures to metric values resulted in the loss of the Mars Climate Orbiter on September 23, 1999. The cost for the orbiter and lander combined was \$327.6 million, which didn't include the hundreds of million dollars spent on spacecraft development, the launch, and mission operations (Wheaton, 1999; "Human Error...", 1999).

The frightening aspect to math illiteracy is that it is socially accepted in our society. B. S. Smith and W. Hageman Smith (1997) point out that if a guest at a dinner party were to announce that he is illiterate, the reaction would be shock or

disdain. However, if this same guest were to confess that he has trouble with basic math skills, the reaction would quite likely be sympathy, commiseration, and a reciprocal confession of mathematical shortcomings. Smith and Smith continue to assert that in our society, people who enjoy and/or excel at math are often considered to be "not quite normal" (p. 2).

It is important for all of us to have an appreciation for the role of mathematics in the world. Having a firm foundation in mathematics is essential to understanding computer technology, engineering, and the sciences. Furthermore, there are skills learned in a math class that can be applied to almost all life situations. Math teaches students how to think logically, to reason inductively and deductively, and to design and follow an algorithm to solve a problem. These are skills that are useful in just about every field of study and every occupation.

Yet, for many people, mathematics is a subject that is largely feared and despised. According to an Associated Press-America Online Poll, in a nationwide survey of adults, math was ranked as the most unpopular subject. Nearly 4 out of 10 polled said they hated math (McDonald, 2005). The most common attitude of the average student taking a math class is to learn just enough to get the desired grade

***Having a firm foundation in mathematics is essential to understanding computer technology, engineering, and the sciences.***

### Math Resource Center

SE 106 • Phone: 989.964.4648 • E-mail: [mathtutor@svsu.edu](mailto:mathtutor@svsu.edu) • [www.svsu.edu/mathcenter](http://www.svsu.edu/mathcenter)

#### Tutoring Hours

Monday–Thursday: 9 a.m.–7 p.m.  
Friday: 10 a.m.–1 p.m.  
Sunday: 6 p.m.–9 p.m.

#### Business Hours

Monday–Thursday: 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.  
Friday: 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

#### The Math Resource Center provides:

- Free walk-in tutoring for SVSU students
- Preparatory materials for the Math Placement Test
- "Second-chance" math placement testing
- Course pages with syllabi and exam review material for the coordinated classes (in progress)
- Preparatory materials for the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC) Basic Skills Test
- Math Placement and MTTC Basic Skills workshops
- Study sessions for Math 081/082 (a pilot program)

and then never think about the material again. Especially with the ever-growing developments in technology, students seem to fall into the trap of thinking that they will never need to use any math skills on an everyday basis. Yet with our growing dependence on technology, all of us will find an increasing need for people with the mathematical skills to understand and develop this technology. Math skills are required for work in engineering, alternative energy research, life sciences, actuarial sciences, finance, and computer science. It is alarming to realize that more than 40% of the doctorates awarded in 2004 in technical fields were given to non-U.S. citizens (Lederman, 2005). For us to remain in control of the technology and our way of life, it becomes ever more important for future generations to maintain a high level of mathematical literacy.

To help promote math literacy at SVSU, the Math Resource Center began operation in 1995. It was started largely through the efforts of Dr. Thomas Kullgren, then the dean of the College of Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), and Dr. John Mooningham, then and still chairman of the Department of

Mathematical Sciences. The Center was opened for the sole purpose of helping students who were having difficulty in their math classes. During its inception and for several subsequent years, the Center was financed partially out of the budget of SET and partially from grant monies. At that time, the Math Resource

Center was located in the engineering library. Since then, the Center has been brought under the direct supervision of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, who has ensured that the Center has continuous funding, relocated the Center to its current convenient location in Science East 106, and enabled the Center to provide more services to our students.

The job of the Math Resource Center is

to help students succeed in their math classes and to feel more comfortable with mathematics in general. One large component of this goal is to help those students at Saginaw Valley who have the highest level of anxiety about mathematics overcome their fear of math and realize that anyone can increase their skill level with study, practice, and a little help from their friends at the Center. We want to help teach students the mathematical skills needed to succeed in math courses, and other courses that use mathematics. We strive to offer a relaxed and friendly environment where students can come to work on their homework, get tutoring help with general or specific problems, or just hang out to get advice and support. We hope that students will take full advantage of the services we offer, and we encourage students to drop by and check us out. And, of course, we're always open to suggestions on how we can better meet student needs.

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***For us to remain in control of technology and our way of life, it becomes ever more important for future generations to maintain a high level of mathematical literacy.***

## Book Review

### *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines.*

Katherine Gottschalk and Keith Hjortshoj.  
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 172 pp.

Reviewed by

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Admittedly, I initially chose *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines* at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March 2007 simply because it was another free resource offered by Bedford/St. Martin's. No inspiring quotes, magnificent artwork, or impressive fonts grace the cover. There is only a pea green background with a black band framing the white letters of the title. Yet, beneath the unassuming green and black cover, Gottschalk and Hjortshoj provide a wealth of valuable information, offering practical advice to teachers of writing as well as presenting realistic suggestions for incorporating writing into all disciplines.

Gottschalk and Hjortshoj indicate writing instruction takes place in a variety of disciplines outside of composition; therefore, they claim, writing instruction is a tool that can be used by all faculty, not simply those in the composition classroom. Too often, instructors are dissatisfied with the quality of writing produced, but it is through additional writing instruction, the authors assert, that instructors will not only improve writing, but improve course understanding. Yet,

if teachers simply add writing assignments and instruction to the existing design of a course, they create more work for themselves and for their students. If they try to teach writing on the side of teaching substance, that work tends to become sidelined: marginal and less substantial. If they try to make room for writing instruction with a cut-and-paste approach, they

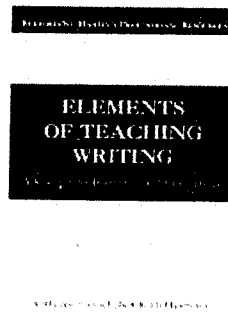
feel they have sacrificed important content and reduced the substance of the course. (15-16)

Thus, "writing assignments and instruction are most effective when they are fully integrated with learning and content in a field of study" (17).

*The Elements of Teaching Writing* works to do just that: provide a variety of suggestions and applications to integrate writing in all disciplines. The text begins with ideas for course design, building writing into a course syllabus, and then moves to designing specific assignments, responding to student work, and revising writing. The final chapters of the text include suggestions for addressing sentence-level errors, guiding students through the research process, as well as strategies for writing inclusion in large courses.

Chapters follow a basic and efficient format, with a thorough "Key Elements" section (complete with detailed descriptions) opening each chapter. The "Key Elements" section of Chapter 9, "Strategies for Including Writing in Large Courses," for example, includes such topics as "Assigning Less To Achieve More," "Assigning Writing That Is Not Graded (or Even Read)," "Responding to Writing: Taking Time To Save Time," and "Using Writing Centers To Help with Instruction." The chapter is clearly a useful resource when faced with the daunting task of handling the inevitable paper load of larger classes.

Additionally, each chapter offers best practices (easily found through bulleted



lists) and sample exercises, examples, and assignments. This use of examples is perhaps one of the most effective elements of the text. Chapter 2, "Designing Writing Assignments and Assignment Sequences," for instance, offers sample assignments, types of assignments and suggested sequencing. Chapter 3, "What Can You Do with Student Writing?," offers suggestions of how to reply to student writing, looks at end comments, and discusses how to save time when grading writing.

***Too often, I find that students submit drafts but fail to revise, even after extensive peer-review sessions.***

As a teacher of writing, I found Chapter 4, "Assigning and Responding to Revision" one of the most valuable. Too often, I find that students submit drafts but fail to revise, even after intensive peer-review sessions. This, of course, may be because

the student did not have time to revise, did not wish to revise, or simply because the student submitted his/her best work and did not know how to improve the writing or incorporate revision suggestions. Chapter 4 addresses these concerns, as it begins with a discussion of revision and then presents suggestions for "Revision before Submission of a Draft." Gottschalk and

Hjortshoj suggest that, as teachers, "we need to delay that 'sense of completion'"; by assigning students to write about a paper, write introductions and conclusions, write multiple proposals, and write counterarguments, students do not feel as though the draft is a final product; they see the writing as a process and a "work in progress" (66-67). This revision suggestion is yet another useful strategy offered by the authors and one of many suggestions I will work to incorporate into my writing courses.

SVSU faculty, particularly those teaching Communication Intensive (CI) courses, looking to integrate writing into their classrooms and improve student comprehension of course material will find this book extremely beneficial. Though *The Elements of Teaching Writing* is certainly not the most comprehensive writing resource, the simplicity and accessibility of the information make the text a quick read and certainly worth reviewing based on the volume of topics presented. And while teachers of writing outside of the English Department may want to consider more detailed texts relating to their disciplines, all writing teachers will certainly find this text a useful resource.